READ YOUR ELECTRIC BILL?....PLEASE

You know how much you spend on gasoline, how your choice of cars and how much you drive affects it. You probably spend nearly the same amount on electricity, with little or no idea where it goes and how choices you make affect it...and since homes don't come with an EPA fuel economy rating, buying a new house can be a real guessing game when it comes to energy consumption. The newly formed Environmental Initiatives Committee (EIC) is hoping to change that.

Building upon first hand experience with the newly constructed Town Hall, the EIC is working to find appropriate ways to encourage residents and contractors to consider energy consumption when building or remodeling.

The first place to start learning is by looking a little deeper at your utility bill. In addition to listing the bottom line amount that you owe, every bill lists the amount of kilowatt-hours consumed over the course of the month. A kilowatt-hour is the amount of energy that one 100 watt light bulb will use in ten hours (100 watts x 10 hours = 1000 watt-hours). This is the standard unit of energy consumption. Among homes belonging to EIC members, the committee found a wide range of electric consumption. Usage varied from about 2.5 to 7 kWh per square foot per year. The homes in the upper end of that range pay PG&E's highest rate for half or more of their electricity, currently around 28-cents/kwatt hour (it's going up next year). Sort of like paying $6 per gallon of gas! If you are curious to see how you are doing, add up the "kWh Billed" (not the kWh per day) in 12 months of PG&E bills (or just multiply the kWh Billed in your May bill by 12), then divide by your home's square footage. The EIC would love to hear your result-we are very interested in finding out what is really "typical" in Los Altos Hills, and we will keep names confidential.

If we learned anything from the town's experience with the town hall, it's that if the right questions are asked during design, significant reductions can be realized in a building's energy appetite for a very reasonable cost. New construction is where the Town can have the most impact on our future energy demand. Under consideration by the committee is an ordinance to require (a) the site-specific simulation of a proposed new home's energy use, and (b) demonstration of proposed homes above a certain size ability to achieve grid-supplied energy consumption 25% below California's basic residential building requirements - through any combination of design and energy efficiency measures or on-site renewable power generation (typically solar). The simulation would inform the owner, ahead of time, what the home's energy consumption will be given its specific location, lot, design and proposed equipment. This 25% reduction is the same target as a new EnergyStar Home program that PG&E will roll out next year. The EIC plans to hold a study session with the Town Council on this proposal on September 15th. We welcome your input. To reach the committee, send an email to Karen Jost (kjost@losaltoshills.ca.gov) or to the Chair, Peter Evans (PeterEvans@NewPowerTech.com).

SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM AND ELECTRIC CAR PROVIDE FREE HOUSE ELECTRICITY AND FREE MILES

Four years ago, at the height of the California energy crisis, we installed a solar voltaic system with a capacity of 3600 watts. This consisted of 36 Siemens 100 watt panels that were mounted on 3 dual axis trackers, which keep the panels pointed at the sun. The panels were installed on the Northeast corner of the property in the cow pasture.

By the middle of the second year of operation, it became obvious that our surplus to PGE was going to be more than $200 for which we would not get paid. The obvious solution was to buy one of the Toyota Rav4 EV's that were available at that time (the end of 2002).

I was somewhat expecting this car to more than use up our surplus, and fully expected to owe PGE something for the third year. But after the first full year's use of the RAV4 EV, we still had a zero bill with PGE.

After rebates and tax credits the solar system cost about $26,000 and the car about $29,000. I would have bought both without the rebates and taxes credits and never intend to go back to a gasoline car. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to buy a production electric vehicle, but I am hoping that by the time our car wears out, that some other car company will be selling one again, so that we will continue to have the option of living and driving oil and greenhouse gas free.

—Mark Jensen, Resident

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Bullis Charter School Play

The BCS lower grades play is scheduled for December 7-10, 2005. Please Check the BCS website for times and location: www.bullischarterschool.com